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Gender Perspective in Tayub Dance and Sustainable Agriculture

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ABSTRACT

Tayub dance represents a significant cultural phenomenon within Indonesian society, as its emergence and continued existence are inextricably linked to environmental influences including the community, nature, culture, and agriculture. While numerous existing articles discuss the art of Tayub, most focus on its rituals, history, or humanistic aspects; in contrast, this article specifically examines the existence of Tayub in relation to feminism and sustainable agriculture. Thus, this study aims to explore gender perspectives within Tayub dance and its relevance to sustainable agriculture. Employing a descriptive qualitative method, the study utilizes secondary data collected from books, newspapers, journals, and articles on reputable websites. The findings reveal the distinct role women play in agricultural activities spanning planting, crop maintenance, and harvesting, demonstrating harmony among all family and community members within middle-class and grassroots populations. The article concludes that Tayub is rooted in the lower strata of society rather than the aristocracy, reflecting harmony among rural community members encompassing not only patriarchal groups but also women. Consequently, this research offers valuable insights into the intersections of culture, humanism, and sustainable agriculture for interested parties.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is the world's largest archipelagic nation, comprising over 17,300 islands ranging from large to small, and including some that remain unnamed, scattered across various regions. This geographical reality has shaped Indonesia's heterogeneous and multicultural socio-demographic landscape [1]. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) indicates that there are 1,340 ethnic groups in the country, each possessing its own distinct culture, customs, and traditions [2].

Java is one of Indonesia's most important regions, as it is home to approximately 40% of the country's total population. The Javanese people possess a distinctive culture that has evolved over a vast period, resulting in a highly complex cultural heritage. This complexity is evident across various aspects, including the arts, customs, culinary traditions, and social structures. Almost all forms of Javanese culture are imbued with deep meaning and philosophical values [3], [4], [5], [6], [7].

One aspect of Javanese culture that remains well-known is the Tayub Dance. As a popular folk art form, Tayub is often reductively viewed merely as a medium of entertainment or a spectacle [8], [9], [10]. The Tayub dance is typically performed in conjunction with agricultural activities as an expression of gratitude for the blessings bestowed by God [8], [11]. For agrarian communities, this traditional art form is an integral part of village purification ceremonies (bersih desa).[18] Alternatively, it is also used in earth-offering rituals (sedekah bumi) [12], [13], [14], as well as rites ensuring the fertility of agricultural land, particularly rice fields. The Tayub dance holds a significance far more fundamental than mere aesthetic expression; it is an intrinsic part of the belief system of agrarian communities.

Within the structure of traditional Javanese society, the Tayub dance has historically functioned as a ritual institution closely linked to fertility rites. Its presence is a key requirement in various customary ceremonies such as *Sedekah Bumi* (*Earth Offering*) or Bersih Desa (*Village Cleansing*), which are held to express gratitude for the harvest while simultaneously invoking safety and favorable conditions for the agricultural cycle. In Sragen Regency, for instance, the dancers are believed to possess magical powers capable of imbuing the farmland with a spirit of fertility. This phenomenon reflects a collective awareness regarding the maintenance of natural balance and the seeking of protection against threats to environmental sustainability, such as crop pest infestations.

The Tayub dance and women are inextricably linked. Within the paradigm of Javanese art and culture, both embody themes ranging from the struggle for women's rights to gender equality. This aligns with the statement by W.J.S. Poerwadarminta, who noted that:

> "*...Tayub is a word rich in meaning. Some interpret it as "cik ben guyup" (fostering togetherness), while others interpret it as "nata guyup" (organizing togetherness). All interpretations point to themes of communal solidarity, solace, and the enduring hope of the grassroots community to continue their work in farming or other agricultural activities*." [15]

The statement above indicates that Tari Tayub signifies the common involvement of women in the world of work in Java, reflecting a synergy between men and women in sustaining the family economy. Furthermore, it reflects enduring aspirations regarding the cultivated land, representing harmony with nature as a collective responsibility.

The Tayub dance phenomenon embodies values and ideas regarding women's participation and sustainable agricultural practices. When viewed through the lens of international relations dynamics, Tayub dance and the role of women intersect with a broader spectrum of issues including environmentalism, feminism, and the economic

empowerment of marginalized groups [12], [13]. Accordingly, this study further examines and analyzes the gender perspective within the context of Tayub dance and sustainable agriculture.

Tayub dance possesses unique characteristics compared to typical folk dances in the regions of Central Java, the Special Region of Yogyakarta, and parts of East Java. Please refer to Table 1 below:

Table 1. Characteristics of Tayub Dance

No	Subject	Information
1.	Period and beginning of development	The Old Javanese period, set against the backdrop of the Singasari, Majapahit, and Mataram kingdoms.
2.	Commonly found regions	Central Java, covering Blora, Sragen, Purwodadi, Pati, Rembang, and several other areas on a smaller scale; East Java, covering Bojonegoro, Nganjuk, Pacitan, and several other areas on a smaller scale; and the Special Region of Yogyakarta, covering Sleman and Gunung Kidul.
3.	Operational characteristics	It features a senior dancer (Ledhek) and is open or inclusive in nature, allowing for audience participation.
4.	Momentum for implementation	This dance expresses gratitude and joy. It is typically performed after the harvest or during celebrations.

Data Source: Purba [16]

As an integral part of Javanese art and culture, the Tayub dance has endured and continuously transformed while navigating the challenges of changing times. Each performance allows for adaptations and adjustments ranging from ritual elements and instrumentation to environmental adaptations. Despite this evolution, Tayub remains a dance rich in meaning, particularly regarding the role of women as symbolic figures and the connection to the surrounding agricultural context.

The themes of gender and sustainable agriculture within the Tayub dance embody values and symbols both explicit and implicit that present a compelling subject for further study across cultural, artistic, and humanistic dimensions. This is due to several factors, notably that the female dancer serves as the dance's focal point. Furthermore, the art form encompasses ideas regarding the spirit of togetherness and communal attitudes, among other concepts worthy of deeper exploration. Consequently, this study addresses the question of the gender perspective within the Tayub dance and its relevance to sustainable agriculture.

2. METHOD

The methodology section of this article begins by establishing a qualitative research design. This approach was chosen to ensure objectivity and effectiveness, as it allows for the exploration of underlying messages and a detailed explanation of social phenomena and activities ranging from organizational aspects, interactions, influences, and impacts to policies and practices within the context of gender perspectives in the Tayub dance tradition. The article utilizes secondary data collection techniques to complement the interview process [17].

The research was conducted at the Slamet Riyadi University Library in Surakarta to gather literature-based data, and among the community in the Plupuh District of Sragen Regency. The study took place between May and August 2026. The research population consisted of selected individuals who participated in structured interviews guided by a set protocol; this ensured the acquisition of authentic field data that directly complemented textual information derived from books, journals, and official websites.

To ensure data validity and effectiveness, the author employed a data processing strategy that involved sorting incoming information, discarding irrelevant material, and selecting pertinent data for inclusion in the manuscript. The gathered data is organized into specific subsections for further analysis based on the theoretical frameworks applied in the study [17].

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sustainable agriculture is a concept with broad significance. Viewed through the lens of Javanese art and culture, the values and traditions associated with *Memayu Hayuning Bawana,* the philosophy of harmonizing and beautifying the world, have long been actualized through various activities, with the Tayub dance being one such example. This dance embodies several significant meanings: women acting as active participants, women symbolizing the movement and struggle to build socio-economic activities, and the pursuit of self-reliance by reducing dependence on external parties. It is these elements that position the Tayub performance as an artistic expression of ecofeminism.

The concepts of gender and agriculture, when viewed through the lens of communication and cultural analysis, are relevant to ecofeminism. In essence, this ideology represents a social movement that links the oppression of women with environmental degradation. Consequently, ecofeminism serves as a theoretical framework that positions the practice of Tayub as an antithesis, acting as a form of resistance against both the oppression of women and the destruction of the ecosystem.

Daniela Rosendo and Tania A. Kuhnen state that ecofeminism is an ideology linking women and the environment, including women's relationships with wildlife and flora, which ultimately aims to dismantle patriarchal oppression. The 2020s mark a milestone in the advancement of ecofeminism, characterized by the alignment of this ideology with social movements, the emergence of NGOs, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda [18], [19], [20].

Other literature describes ecofeminism as a movement or ideology that is ethically and aesthetically rooted in respect for both women and nature. Riku Panigrahi and Hitkaran Singh Ranawat state that:

> ”*... ecofeminism is a social movement that emerged in the late 1970s and has continued to evolve and transform to this day. Initially, the movement focused on the interactions between living beings and their surrounding physical environment; over time, however, it shifted its attention toward issues of environmental degradation and resource depletion, while also giving rise to sentiments regarding birth rates and the struggle for women's rights*.” [21]

The statement above indicates that ecofeminism is a social movement that emerged in the late 1970s and has continued to evolve and transform to the present day. Initially, ecofeminism emphasized the interaction between living beings and their surrounding physical environment; over time, it shifted its focus toward issues of environmental degradation and resource depletion, while also giving rise to concerns regarding birth rates and the struggle for women's rights.

Within the feminist paradigm, men and women possess different characteristics. Fundamental differences include the tendency for men to prioritize emotion, whereas women tend to prioritize feelings. Furthermore, men tend to gravitate toward power, while women tend to embody affection and compassion. Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen state that:

> ”....*From a traditional perspective, patriarchal culture arises naturally from the existence of distinct beings who bear their own respective consequences and responsibilities. In the view of feminism, however, patriarchal culture is a myth. Furthermore, women exist as both cultural and biological beings, inextricably linked to social and political constructs and, of course, to the environment*.” [22]

The statement above indicates that, from a classical perspective, patriarchal culture arises naturally, reflecting the distinct natures of beings who bear their own respective consequences and responsibilities. In the view of feminism, however, patriarchal culture is a myth. Furthermore, women exist as both cultural and biological beings, inextricably linked to social and political constructs and, naturally, to their relationship with the environment.

Ecofeminism emerged in France during the 1970s as a form of environmental rescue movement led by women activists of the era. A decade later, the movement expanded widely across Europe and North America, driven by the proliferation of ecological disasters resulting from haphazard development policies and corporate operations that disregarded environmental sustainability [23], [24], [25], [26]. Fundamentally, ecofeminism comprises three key concepts and ideas, namely:

a. The existence of oppression stemming from men manifesting either overtly or covertly through various *modus operandi* typically involving exploitation, domination, and commodification.
b. The presence of a *logic of domestication* that links women viewed as being close to nature to their marginalization by materialistic and patriarchal cultures.
c. The connection between the existence of women in rural areas and the traditional knowledge that helps maintain ecological balance.

Ecofeminism continues to evolve progressively, successfully generating new ideas. Pooja Sharma and Nitika Thakur highlight several key points, noting that the involvement of women in agriculture is ideal. Furthermore, women can act as initiators in producing agricultural goods with low environmental impact; issues such as family well-being, efficient resource utilization, and climate-related challenges are also integral to ecofeminism.

The gender perspective within the Tayub dance tradition demonstrates that women's involvement in sustainable agricultural development is an integral part of Javanese culture. The philosophy of "Memayu Hayuning Buwano" serves as a foundation for the Javanese people, embodying a moral responsibility to beautify, care for, and preserve the world. Consequently, Javanese culture encompasses various activities and rites dedicated to environmental stewardship, including agricultural management practices ranging from *resik-resik* (communal cleaning) and *slametan* (communal feasts) to more specific rituals such as *wiwitan, methil*, and *sabuk gunung*/ [27].

The role of women in sustainable agricultural development is linked to established cultural norms. Viewed through the lens of Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen's ecofeminist propositions, this role is connected to the concept of sustainability and continuity as a shared responsibility. This reinforces the premise that agriculture is open to all. Please refer to the following table for a comparison between men and women:

Table 2. Comparison of Sustainable Agriculture within the Ecofeminist Paradigm

No	Factor of Variable	Male Perspective	Female Perspective
1.	Responsibility towards the environment	Less dominant involvement	Play a dominant role
2.	Responsibility for agricultural progress	Play a dominant role	Less dominant involvement
3.	Dominance over the agricultural sector	Play a dominant role	Less dominant involvement
4.	The interconnection between agriculture and culture	Less dominant involvement	Play a dominant role
5.	Socio-political construction	Play a dominant role	Less dominant involvement
6.	Socio-economic construction	Less dominant involvement	Less dominant involvement
7.	Attention to ecological damage	Less dominant involvement	Play a dominant role

Source: Compiled from various sources

The table above demonstrates that, from the perspective of ecofeminism, the existence of women operates primarily at a philosophical level, whereas the position of men lies at a technical level. Furthermore, within the context of Javanese culture, the existence of women as viewed through this framework is inextricably linked to initiatives aimed at generating long-term benefits, in contrast to the patriarchal camp, which prioritizes short-term gains.

Gender perspectives are shaped by paradigms influenced by various factors, including politics, society, the economy, and culture. In some instances, negative gender-related trends are linked to the prevalence of poverty, low levels of education, and adherence to customs whose validity is asserted unilaterally. Regarding patriarchal culture within the dynamics of sustainable agriculture, a dichotomy emerges between the lives of grassroots and rural communities and those of the "priyayi" (*aristocratic*) "class. Farmers have long constituted a rural community striving to secure a livelihood amidst significant constraints; consequently, the involvement of women typically drawn from their immediate circles, such as wives, daughters, relatives, or the local community, plays a crucial role [28].

The existence of the Tayub dance serves as a form of Javanese cultural expression that reflects the lives of rural Javanese communities. When viewed through the lens of

Eaton and Lorentzen's propositions regarding domestic logic and women's existence, the values and ideas embodied in this art form are linked to expressions of gratitude, harmony, and unity. This aligns with the ecofeminist approach, which offers a critical perspective on the central role of women [29], [30].

Women serve as symbolic figures due to pre-existing, collectively held values that have been passed down through generations—such as the perception that women are less prone to extravagance, are responsible for managing food reserves, and generally avoid vices like gambling. It is from these perceptions that concepts like Ibu Pertiwi (Mother Earth/Motherland) and Dewi Sri (the Goddess of Rice and Prosperity) have emerged as significant cultural values.

The Tayub dance, an art form rich in communal values and traditions that reflect ecofeminist principles, continues to be preserved in various regions of Java. In this article, the researcher documents Tayub dance practice sessions in Plupuh District, Sragen Regency. Please refer to Figure 1 below:



Figure 1. Overview of Tayub Practice
Source: Author's Documentation

The connection between the Tayub dance and the ecofeminist paradigm, specifically regarding the role of women as a positive force in shaping sustainable agriculture, was affirmed by Danyang Subur, an activist at the Subur Budaya arts studio in Bulakrejo, Plupuh, Sragen. In an interview addressing the existence of women within sustainable agriculture, he stated:

> "…*Dewi Sri is not merely a myth; there is truth to the concept if approached with genuine sincerity. As religious people, we believe in God, yet Dewi Sri is not simply folklore containing falsehoods or ideas that conflict with religion. She represents an ancestral heritage and tradition. Various terms, rituals, and customary events honoring Dewi Sri as a goddess or symbol of fertility persist*

and are maintained in many regions; for instance, in Yogyakarta, the Wiwit ceremony marks the beginning of the planting season." (interview result)

Continuing the conversation with Danyang Subur, the author asked about the relationship between women and sustainable agriculture, specifically framing the Tayub dance as a ritual act of preservation and stewardship. He elaborated further:

"…*Specific mantras are recited during both the planting and harvesting of rice. Precise timing is also observed; for example, planting should ideally take place in the morning from sunrise until around 7:00 AM, as this is believed to positively influence the yield. Every 30 days, a tolak balak ceremony is held to ward off negative elements from the vicinity of the rice fields. The traditional rice-planting process can be artistically expressed through the Tayub dance*." (interview result)

Regarding the evolution of the Tayub dance, a form of community entertainment often burdened by a negative stigma, the author consulted Danyang Subur, who stated:

"…For a long time, the public has viewed Tayub dancers as 'cheap' women who are easily propositioned by men and readily accept money. However, when examined through a cultural lens, the Tayub dance is not merely a form of entertainment for women; it embodies moral values. In the context of Javanese culture, women symbolize fertility. In the Sragen community, Tayub is typically performed during the harvest season as a celebratory expression of gratitude for a successful rice crop. As a symbol of fertility, the dance usually involves both female and male dancers. This signifies that achieving success and fertility requires men and women to work together, assisting and supporting one another. It is this perspective that should be shared with the public, ensuring that Tayub as a cultural tradition is not viewed as taboo or negative, but is instead preserved." (interview result)

Regarding the existence of the Tayub dance as a representation of philosophical values concerning women and sustainable agriculture, the author consulted Danyang Subur, who stated:

"*...To date, the village farming community has been dominated by men. Men are involved in the entire process of rice cultivation, except for the actual planting. Men lack the necessary patience and meticulousness, so it is the women who perform the planting. Furthermore, this task is not as physically strenuous as the work men do; women also handle the majority of domestic chores. About five months ago, lecturers from ISI and Unisri visited Cangkol village to provide guidance. They emphasized that work, including agricultural activities, should be a collaborative effort between men and women. Women should not merely be paid laborers; they also have the right to make decisions regarding matters such as fertilizer selection and the timing of planting. These lecturers also highlighted the intrinsic link between agriculture and cultural elements like dance and folklore,*

specifically the Tayub dance and the legend of Dewi Sri. Tayub is not merely entertainment; it teaches the importance of cooperation between men and women within the household. Rice fields, as the community's source of livelihood, should be managed effectively through the joint participation of both women and men. Women, symbolized by Dewi Sri and men, symbolized by Sri Sadono, represent a farming couple working together to manage the land, from soil preparation, seed selection, and sowing, through to the final harvest. The Tayub dance serves as an expression of gratitude to the Almighty for a successful rice crop." (interview result)

The Tayub dance stands as a form of artistic expression that embodies the values of women's involvement in agricultural activities. In the past, before sustainable agriculture became a prominent issue, or even before it was linked to broader concerns regarding environmental stewardship as outlined in the MDGs or SDGs, women embodied the continuity of responsible agriculture, ensuring it could be passed down to future generations while avoiding the exploitation and domination of nature.

The role of women in sustainable agriculture, as reflected in the Tayub dance, demonstrates that the notion of male dominance is not entirely accurate. In stable socio-economic conditions free from conflict, women can assume increasingly significant roles. Furthermore, the inclusion of women in sustainable agriculture helps prevent the exploitation, domination, and commodification that Javanese women might otherwise face when working in other sectors.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that sustainable agriculture is a concept born of a sense of responsibility for the sustainability of the immediate ecosystem, particularly in the rural areas of Java. The concept refers to efforts to maintain the viability of agricultural cultivation in the long term amidst the environmental degradation facing the region.

The dynamics of sustainable agriculture in Java do not entail a dichotomy or gender bias. This is because agricultural activities in Java have long developed in rural areas that serve as the livelihood base for common people rather than the aristocracy. The division of labor within this sector follows unwritten conventions that have become established norms. Philosophically, the involvement of women contributes to crop care and post-harvest processes that place great emphasis on traditional practices and environmental sustainability.

The gender perspective within the Tayub dance in the context of sustainable agriculture connects to national and international issues, ranging from environmental concerns, feminism, and grassroots movements (involving marginalized groups) to universal cultural values. This dance form embodies values and ideas regarding the harmony of socio-economic activities without compromising environmental sustainability, paralleling the principles of sustainable agriculture. Furthermore, it reflects values of communal solidarity; Tayub is a performance staged in an open, egalitarian manner that actively involves the audience.

In this study, the author offers recommendations to academics in communication, social sciences, and the humanities, as well as to the general public. Academics in communication studies are encouraged to explore Indonesian arts and cultural practices linked to ecosystem and environmental sustainability, thereby generating ideas to support the effective and responsible management of these aspects. Meanwhile, the general public, particularly the Javanese community, is encouraged to steadfastly uphold traditions and pass on to younger generations the concepts and ideas regarding the responsible management of nature, ecosystems, and the environment as an integral part of daily life and future-building.

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